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# Getting Outside Help

## How Trust Problems Explain Household Differences in Domestic Outsourcing in the Netherlands

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This article examines the influence of trust problems on the use of domestic outsourcing by couples from a gender perspective. The authors argue that trust problems matter in outsourcing decisions, because an outsider enters the privacy of the household and takes over tasks of special value. Analyses of data from a survey among 740 Dutch couples show that trust problems faced by female partners influence the outsourcing of female tasks, and the same reasoning applies to male partners. Partners who are more trusting toward others are more likely to outsource own-gender tasks. Conversely, greater skills reduce the trust problem for opposite-gender tasks, that is, men's skills increase the likelihood of outsourcing child care, whereas women's skills increase the outsourcing of home maintenance.

**Keywords:** *domestic outsourcing; trust; gender; transaction costs*

A growing body of research focuses on domestic outsourcing (Bittman, Matheson, & Meagher, 1999) as an alternative for own household labor. Examples of outsourcing are the use of services of cleaners, handy-men, babysitters, day care centers, takeaway restaurants, and so forth. The increase in the interest for domestic outsourcing is an obvious extension of the well-developed literature on the household division of labor, with the

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focus being shifted from the division of labor between partners toward the division of labor between the household and third parties. Previous studies were typically inspired by the notion of outsourcing as a time-saving strategy for harried households trying to meet the demands of both the home and paid work (Bellante & Foster, 1984; Brayfield, 1995; Cohen, 1998; Hanson & Ooms, 1991; Oropesa, 1993; Soberon-Ferrer & Dardis, 1991). Researchers generally assume that households with less available time outsource their tasks relatively more often, but empirical evidence does not consistently support this view (see de Ruijter, van der Lippe, & Raub, 2003, for an overview).

This study examines the role of trust in household outsourcing. Previous studies neglected the fact that hiring outside help for domestic work is of a different nature than dividing household tasks between partners. For one thing, whereas the division of domestic work and caring tasks between partners takes place within the context of family loyalty, which overrules the unbridled pursuit of self-interest (Pollak, 1985), the outsourcing of household tasks to outsiders involves substantial trust problems that may deter households from outsourcing. The outsourcing supplier is less concerned with the welfare of the household than the household members are, and the supplier may perform household tasks unsatisfactorily. Households hiring domestic help are often "particularly worried about the theft of household items" (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001, p. 78), whereas parents hiring a babysitter may even fear kidnapping of their babies, physical abuse, or that the children are left to watch television. Moreover, family loyalties are created, among others, by performing domestic tasks. Domestic labor is not just work but also an expression of social bonds (e.g., Ahlander & Bahr, 1995; DeVault, 1991). Therefore, the explanation of third-party involvement calls for a more subtle approach than a mere transfer of ideas on the division of labor within households. Naturally, theories on the division of household labor can be of aid in the study of domestic outsourcing, but the trust problems have to be taken into account as well.

In household outsourcing, an outsider comes to perform domestic tasks for the household, which means that the privacy of the household is invaded in two major ways. First, the supplier of the outsourcing service often physically enters the home, even at times when there are no household members present. Domestic cleaners, for instance, generally work unsupervised and alone. Second, the outsourcing supplier (partially) takes over tasks of special value to the household. It is important that suppliers of outsourcing services can be trusted within the private sphere of the household, especially

when it comes to special tasks such as child care. Trust is a very important issue for parents when "hiring someone for this 'labor of love'" (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001, p. 68).

We combine insights from the trust literature and family sociology to explain household outsourcing. The role of trust has been studied extensively in organization research, focusing mainly on the choice between own production and market exchange (make-or-buy decisions). These studies have shown that trust problems may cause firms to refrain from market transactions (e.g., Masten, 1996; Monteverde & Teece, 1996; see Shelanski & Klein, 1995, for an overview). Households are faced with similar decisions between own domestic labor and outsourcing. However, we cannot simply transfer insights from the trust literature to the household because organization studies typically consider firms as collective entities. In family research, the assumption of households as single entities is problematic. The interests of female and male partners in households often differ, which has consequences for, among others, the division of household labor (e.g., Hochschild, 1989; Shelton & John, 1993). Outsourcing studies showed that gender affects the types of tasks surrendered to outsiders (Cohen, 1998; de Ruijter, Treas, & Cohen, 2005; Oropesa, 1993).

Trust problems could in fact be more salient for the study of household outsourcing than the economic exchange between firms, because norms or feelings of privacy play an important role. The consequences of potential problems are more far-reaching for households than firms, especially when it comes to outsourcing the care for young children. For this reason, trust problems may be of even greater value for the explanation of household outsourcing than for the exchange between firms. Obviously, trust issues are very important in firm relations as well. In the explanation of other types of household behavior, for example, making financial arrangements in intimate relationships, the application of this approach to the household proved successful (e.g., Ludwig-Mayerhofer, 2000; Pollak, 1985; Treas, 1991, 1993).

In this article we study how trust influences outsourcing of both female and male tasks from a gender perspective. We argue that trust problems matter in outsourcing decisions, because an outsider enters the privacy of the household and takes over tasks of special value. We analyze data of a survey among 740 Dutch couples to test our hypotheses on the effects of gender-specific trust problems on the outsourcing of four particular household tasks, namely home maintenance, cleaning, child care, and cooking. We additionally test hypotheses from the family literature on the benefits of outsourcing as a time-saving strategy.

## Literature Review

### Trust Problems

The trust literature can offer insight into the outsourcing behavior of households. The basic idea is that both the likelihood and the potential consequences of trust problems influence the expected costs of buying a product or service (Williamson, 1981, 1985). Firms can protect themselves from problems by choosing a certain governance structure, such as the detailed contractual planning of a transaction, or by looking for a reliable partner, which is accompanied by so-called transaction costs. These costs have to be made to prevent and solve problems of trust. The properties of a transaction determine which governance structure is the least costly (Coase, 1937/1952; Williamson, 1981, 1985). The most basic distinction can be drawn between the purchase of a service or good on the market and the use of own production (hierarchy): the make-or-buy decision (e.g., Masten, 1996; Monteverde & Teece, 1996; Walker & Weber, 1984). If a firm is more likely to encounter problems when entering a transaction on the market and the damage it can suffer is higher, the firm will incur higher transaction costs to prevent problems. If more trust problems are involved, firms are more likely to opt for own production. A relatively large amount of attention has been devoted to make-or-buy decisions by firms in the transaction cost literature (e.g., Masten, 1996; Monteverde & Teece, 1996; Walker & Weber, 1984).

Just as firms can choose between the purchase of a service or product and the use of own production, so do households face similar make-or-buy decisions between their own domestic labor and outsourcing. Because the outsourcing supplier is not embedded in the context of family loyalty, the supplier's behavior may have undesirable consequences for the household. To prevent problems, households may require references, place surveillance cameras, engage in trial transactions, pay surprise visits, and so forth (see Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001). The costs of solving problems involve, for example, replacing the costly vase broken by the housecleaner or the costs of repainting the house if the handyman has used low-quality paint. These costs decrease the relative attractiveness of outsourcing. Some of these costs are incurred at one point in time, which is mainly the case if households engage in an outsourcing relation with a supplier, for instance when deciding to hire someone to clean the house. Outsourcing tasks to different suppliers, such as the outsourcing of cooking, involves recurrent costs.

Next to trust related to transaction costs, trust theory (Yamagishi, 1986) claims that people differ in the extent to which they trust others. General

trust is a belief “in the benevolence of human nature in general” (Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994, p. 139). According to this theory, people with a higher level of general trust are more likely to engage in relations with people outside their safe environment, such as the family context. Empirical evidence supports this claim (e.g., Yamagishi, Cook, & Watabe, 1998). The underlying reasoning is that trust in others reduces the extent to which people have to incur costs to solve and prevent problems, making outsourcing a more attractive alternative compared to own household labor. A higher level of trust makes it easier for people to discharge their household tasks to people outside their safe family context.

Keeping domestic labor and care within the boundaries of the household also involves costs that have to be made to prevent and solve problems of coordination; transaction costs are incurred to “reduce day-to-day hassles of negotiating and coordinating exchanges (i.e. to avoid distasteful haggling, minimize unpleasant disputes, eliminate awkward misunderstandings, cut down the time wasted policing the performance of others)” (Treas, 1993, p. 724). These costs of own household labor and care are higher when there are bigger coordination problems to deal with. Coordination problems are more likely to arise when multiple roles at work and in the family have to be synchronized (e.g., Voydanoff, 1987, 1988). Also, synchronizing the roles of multiple family members requires coordination—increasing the costs of own household labor.

Our argument does not imply that the quality of “formal” outsourcing alternatives (e.g., professional services) in general is lower than the quality of work done by a family member. For instance, most parents would expect a cleaning service to do a better quality job cleaning their teenager’s room than teenagers themselves. However, in the case of formal outsourcing, households need to invest more in transaction costs to prevent problems (e.g., choosing a supplier who offers safeguards such as quality marks or guarantees). If a household does not incur these costs and opts for a cheap supplier, the consequences of outsourcing can be harmful for the household. Households probably put more trust in family members, embedded in the context of family loyalty, than in a third, unknown party, which decreases the relative costs of own household labor.

We also do not claim that households *have* to choose between own labor and outsourcing, given the amount of housework and care. Of course, households may use alternative strategies to reduce their own time investments in domestic work. They can either outsource or do less work. Owing to women’s entrance to the laborforce, women have less time available for housework. Research has shown that the time women devote to household

work has declined since the 1960s (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000). Men pick up only part of the slack: Although international data show that men's time investment in domestic work has increased since the 1960s at a slow rate (Barnett & Baruch, 1987; Gershuny, Godwin, & Jones, 1994; Sayer, 2005), women still carry the majority of the domestic workload (Bianchi et al., 2000; Presser, 1994; Sayer, 2005). Households cannot afford to pay for outsourcing tasks beyond the basic necessities, and time spent in the private sphere is now spent with children as opposed to housework. It seems that less housework overall is getting done. In general, we expect that trust problems will affect households' outsourcing decisions—although, of course, alternative strategies are available to some extent.

## Gender Influences

A man who earns less than his wife may not be counted on to do more housework so his wife can focus on her job (Brines, 1994). This contradicts not only the comparative advantage logic of economic specialization but also the exchange theory argument that resources (e.g., income) give wives power. Even in dual-earner families, wives carry the majority of family responsibilities (Presser, 1994), although men do increase their share when the wife contributes a larger portion of household income (Bianchi et al., 2000). However, when focusing on total time spent on paid and unpaid work, women are spending more time in work activities than men and, as a result, a 30-minute-per-day free-time gap has emerged (Sayer, 2005). Although higher income increases outsourcing, men's and women's earnings influence outsourcing behavior differently (Oropesa, 1993). Regarding the outsourcing of cleaning, a wife's earnings have more weight than her husband's (Oropesa, 1993), just as a wife's earnings have the larger effect on her time spent in housework (Bianchi et al., 2000; van der Lippe & Siegers, 1994). Husband's and wife's incomes have comparable effects on dining out, which offers a recreational experience as well as an alternative to culinary work at home (Oropesa, 1993).

The gender-typing of tasks should be taken into account as well (Blair & Lichter, 1991; Presser, 1994). Routine domestic chores, such as laundry and cleaning, more often fall to women. On the other hand, occasional tasks, such as maintenance and yard care, are usually seen as men's responsibility (Hochschild, 1989). Bianchi et al. (2000) distinguish between core housework (cooking, meal cleanup, housecleaning, laundry) and less time-intensive, discretionary tasks (outdoor chores, repairs, garden care, animal care, bill paying). Between 1965 and 1995, women dominated the core tasks, and men increased their time doing male-oriented chores.



In addition, one should distinguish between tasks that have always been common to outsource and tasks that have been performed within the household. Many household tasks were previously done by women on an unpaid basis, making the barrier for outsourcing higher. Certain tasks, such as food preparation, have more often been paid for on some level, whereas cleaning the house or looking after the children were usually unpaid activities performed by women. The costs of outsourcing these previously never paid for services are somewhat higher.

So, because people are integrated in wider systems of economic and political power (Blumberg, 1984; Ferree, 1990), macrolevel gender structures and ideologies provide roadmaps for gendered behavior. Sustained by broader social structures and intimate power relations, expectations for gendered behavior influence the division of housework between partners in couple households as well as the type of domestic work they outsource to third parties. According to the gender production perspective, gender is created symbolically, "a routine accomplishment embedded in everyday interaction" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 125). Produced through interactive behaviors—such as household labor—that are linked to gender, gender need not operate on a conscious level (Berk, 1985). Partners embrace own-gender tasks and avoid other-gender tasks. A man in a heterosexual couple will avoid feminine chores but perform masculine tasks for his female partner. A woman will perform women's work about the house and avoid stereotypically male chores. Because women and men carry the responsibility for different types of tasks, it can be expected that they likewise maintain their responsibility for the outsourcing of tasks. Because household tasks are gender-typed, measures of trust problems need to be disaggregated into gender-specific measures.

## Previous Outsourcing Research

Family studies offer two main explanations that focus on outsourcing as a beneficial strategy to cope with domestic duties and care, by replacing unpaid household labor with market substitutes. The *benefits of outsourcing* are assumed to depend on households' available time and the demands of domestic work and care. The time availability explanation (Hiller, 1984) argues that time claims from work increase the outsourcing benefits, because time spent in paid employment reduces the available time for work at home. The time availability hypothesis can be viewed from the perspective of the trust literature. For instance, a more time-consuming job will increase the coordination costs of combining multiple roles at work and home, thus making outsourcing a more attractive alternative.

In most studies, the expected relation was found for food away from home and child care (Bellante & Foster, 1984; Bittman et al., 1999; Kim, 1989; Soberon-Ferrer & Dardis, 1991; Tjldens, van der Lippe, & de Ruijter, 2000; Yen, 1993). However, most studies did not find that less available time increases the use of housekeeping services (Bellante & Foster, 1984; Soberon-Ferrer & Dardis, 1991). Oropesa (1993) did find the expected relationship, but this effect was explained in multivariate models by the wife's income.

According to the demand capability argument (Coverman, 1985), the benefits of outsourcing are higher if there are more children in the household because more work has to be done—although, of course, there may be some scale benefits. Also, households with young children are faced with a relatively large amount of child care and domestic tasks (e.g., children's laundry) and therefore have a higher demand for outsourcing. The demand capability hypothesis can be viewed from the trust literature as well. A larger volume of housework, usually indicated by the number of children and children's age, increases the demands of the family role and the relative costs of coordination problems. These higher transaction costs within the household make outsourcing more likely. Some studies found that young children affect the use of outsourcing alternatives such as housecleaning (Bittman et al., 1999), but others did not find an effect (Cohen, 1998; Soberon-Ferrer & Dardis, 1991; Zick & McCullough, 1996).

In addition, high-income households are more likely to use outsourcing alternatives than low-income households (Bellante & Foster, 1984; Bittman et al., 1999; Cohen, 1998; Oropesa, 1993; Spitze, 1999). Home owners have a higher demand for maintenance and domestic help (Oropesa, 1993). Women with higher education make more use of housekeeping services, if not prepared food (Bellante & Foster, 1984; Cohen, 1998; Soberon-Ferrer & Dardis, 1991; van der Lippe, Tjldens, & de Ruijter, 2004; Yen, 1993). Some studies found that age is associated with a higher likelihood of the outsourcing of cleaning and that older people dine out less often (Bittman et al., 1999; Cohen, 1998), but others did not find age differences (Zick & McCullough, 1996).

## The Dutch Context

In the Netherlands, many women face problems combining work and home and can benefit from outsourcing household tasks. The labor force participation of women has increased rapidly over the last few decades (Tjldens et al., 2000). Nowadays, 77% of women in the age category 25 to 54 participate in the labor market, which is slightly higher than the average female participation rate in Europe of 75% (European Commission, 2004).

Among European member states, the Netherlands stands out as the country where part-time employment is most common: 74% of Dutch working women have a part-time job, whereas the average share of part-time working women in Europe is 31% (European Commission, 2004). The large increase in female labor force participation has not led to a substantial increase in the amount of domestic work by their male partners. Dutch women still perform twice as much domestic work than men (Tijdens et al., 2000). Therefore, the demand for outsourcing in the Netherlands is high (Cancedda, 2001). In the last few decades there has been an increase in the outsourcing of domestic tasks (domestic help, restaurant visits) and child care (de Ruijter, 2004). The Dutch service sector is expanding and household expenditures on services have nearly doubled over the past decade (Statline Statistics Netherlands, 2004).

## Hypotheses

We consider the influence of trust problems on household outsourcing. If more trust problems are involved with outsourcing, households need to incur more costs to prevent problems and therefore are less likely to opt for outsourcing. The likelihood of trust problems depends on (a) job flexibility, (b) domestic skills, (c) quality standards, and (d) general level of trust (de Ruijter, 2005; Yamagishi, 1986). Instead of focusing on the household level, the trust characteristics of female and male partners are expected to influence the outsourcing of own-gender tasks, implying that characteristics of the female partner influence the outsourcing of female tasks. The same reasoning holds for men. It should be noted that we expect that trust problems are especially relevant for caring tasks, because the consequences of potential problems can be far worse in the case of child care compared with domestic tasks. For instance, the damage if a domestic help breaks a vase is much lower than the damage caused if something goes wrong at the day care center.

### Job Flexibility

Job flexibility allows household members to stay at home to observe the efforts of the outsourcing supplier, such as, for instance, whether the house-cleaner works the agreed number of hours. If observation is not possible, the household is less likely to outsource. Both flexible work schedules and working from home allow for monitoring the supplier. If employees can determine their own working hours, they can decide to start late so that they

do not have to give their keys to the supplier or even to stay at home for the entire time that the supplier is at work. Working from home also allows employees to be at home to observe the supplier.

For certain tasks, supervision of the supplier's efforts is not an option, and job flexibility only influences the outsourcing of tasks that have to be performed in the home, such as housecleaning and maintenance (de Ruijter et al., 2003). The outsourcing of cooking and child care outside the home lies beyond the bounds of observation. Also, if a child care provider had to be supervised continuously, outsourcing would not be necessary in most cases. Because the responsibility for household tasks depends on the gender-typing of tasks, it can be expected that the job flexibility of both partners influences the outsourcing of own-gender tasks. That is, women will stay home to monitor the housecleaner, whereas men's flexibility allows them to watch the handyman.

*Hypothesis 1:* More job flexibility of female and male partners increases the likelihood of outsourcing home-based, own-gender tasks.

## Domestic Skills

Households may also face difficulties in judging the quality of the work as a consequence of lack of own skills. If household members have more skills in a certain task, they are better able to judge the quality of the supplier's work—even if they cannot observe the supplier. If more specialized tasks are involved, however, it may be impossible to judge the quality of the supplier's work. For example, it is relatively easy to check whether the housecleaner has cleaned the bathroom, without any monitoring being necessary, but judging the work of a plumber who has repaired a leakage can be more difficult, even under direct observation. For obvious reasons, "skilled" households are less likely to outsource because they can perform certain tasks themselves at a relatively low price. Skills reduce the time needed to perform a task.

We expect that the skills of partners influence the outsourcing of own-gender tasks. Women will judge the quality of the outsourcing service for female tasks whereas men judge male tasks, in part, to show their respective femininity or masculinity. Perhaps men with fewer maintenance skills than their female partner may even avoid having their skilled wife judging the quality of the supplier's work in order to avoid loss of face. It should be noted, however, that the advantage of judging the quality of the work may be offset by the low costs of own household production.

*Hypothesis 2:* Higher skill levels of female and male partners increase the likelihood of outsourcing own-gender tasks.

## Quality Standards

Quality standards reflect the level of performance that household members will tolerate (Bianchi et al., 2000). If households have higher quality standards, trust problems are more likely simply because it is more difficult to meet their standards. In addition, the outsourcing of tasks by households with high standards requires informing the supplier about the required quality level of the service, which increases the costs of outsourcing. For instance, if strict cleanliness is regarded as essential, the household will have to instruct the supplier carefully and may have to search longer for a suitable housecleaner. Parents may have to invest time and effort in explaining to the babysitter that they do not want their children to watch television or eat unhealthy snacks. Quality standards also influence the consequences of potential trust problems. If a task is not performed properly, the consequences are worse for households with higher standards. If a home maintenance supplier has delivered a poor painting job, households with high maintenance standards may invest in repainting the house whereas a household with low standards may even be satisfied with the work. Again, we mainly expect an influence of the partner's standards for own-gender tasks.

*Hypothesis 3:* Higher quality standards of female and male partners decrease the likelihood of outsourcing own-gender tasks.

## General Level of Trust

Households differ in the extent to which they think that suppliers may behave in an undesirable way. People with a high general level of trust are more likely to have faith in a supplier than low trusters, because they think it unlikely that the supplier will take advantage of them. The more trusting households are, the lower the perceived likelihood of trust problems and the lower the costs associated with outsourcing, and the more likely it is that outsourcing services will be sought.

*Hypothesis 4:* A higher general level of trust of female and male partners increases the likelihood of outsourcing own-gender tasks.

## Method

Data were collected by means of a multistage sample of employees of 30 Dutch firms. Home interviews were conducted with 1,114 employees

and, if applicable, their partners at a response rate of 29%. The response rate seems reasonable if we take into account that response rates in the Netherlands for interviews at home vary from 25% to 45% in national probability samples (van der Lippe & Glebbeek, 2003). We focus on couple households, leaving 819 cases. Both partners were interviewed and they filled in written questionnaires. After excluding cases with missing values on our main explanatory and dependent variables, eventually 740 cases are included in the analyses (323 couples with children under age 13 in child care analyses). Slightly more than 70% of all couples in our sample are married, which is a relatively higher figure than in Dutch society. There is an intentional overrepresentation of dual-earner couples in the sample, because the data were collected specifically to study the causes of and solutions to work-home interference (van der Lippe & Glebbeek, 2003). As a consequence, the respondents' educational level is relatively high as well; 57% of the respondents have some college education or more compared to 28% nationally. Because of the sampling method, the sample is not representative.

The dependent variable in our analysis is the outsourcing of several different household tasks: (a) cleaning, (b) home maintenance, (c) child care for children younger than 13, and (d) cooking. To measure the outsourcing of cleaning, the female partner was asked during the face-to-face interview whether the household receives help with cleaning from a housecleaner, housecleaning company, family, or friends and, if so, how many hours on average per week or month for each supplier. For home maintenance, the male partner was asked whether the household received help from home maintenance suppliers (handymen and firms) and family and friends during the past 12 months and, if so, how many days or hours per year for each supplier. Female partners were also asked whether the household received help with child care from babysitters, day care centers, afterschool care, host parents, family, friends, and, if so, how many hours or days on average per month for each supplier. The female partner was asked questions about the household's average number of restaurant visits, cafeteria visits, and purchases of takeaway and preprepared food per month.

Because outsourcing involves trust problems regardless of the number of hours or times of outsourcing and because our outsourcing measures for cleaning, home maintenance, and child care are extremely skewed, the dependent variables for these three tasks simply measure whether a household outsources for a task (1) or not (0). Almost all households outsource cooking to some extent; for this reason, the monthly frequency was used.

To measure earner type, dummy variables for one-and-a-half earners (47%, one partner works 32 hours or more, the other works between 8 and

32 hours) and double earners (35%, both work 32 hours or more) are included. We use 32 hours as the division between part-time and full-time, because 32 hours per week is considered full-time in the Netherlands. These variables are constructed using both partners' factual average number of working hours per week. The one-and-a-half earners are almost all traditional one-and-a-half earners (the male works full-time and the female part-time). Couples with one earner ( $n = 110$ ) or two part-time earners ( $n = 17$ ) are the reference category. Virtually all single-earner couples are traditional, meaning that the male partner participates on the labor market. Including a separate dummy for two part-time earners did not change the results.

To measure the relative share of the female partner in household work (in percentages), both partners were asked to report the average time they themselves spend on household activities per week. We added time spent on grocery shopping, cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, home maintenance (chores, repairs), and administration for the entire week and calculated the share of the female partner relative to the total amount of time spent by the male and female partner. For reasons of social desirability, respondents may be inclined to overestimate the time they spend on housework. This is not problematic if both partners report an overestimation, because we calculate the relative share of the female partner. We also include the number of children younger than 13.

We include two measures for job flexibility. Dummies for working from home were included for the female and male partner, with a value of 1 if the person occasionally works from home. Flexibility of women's and men's work schedule was measured with two questions from the interview, namely, (a) how easy is it to take a day off or to work from home when an unexpected domestic event has taken place (0 = *not possible*; 4 = *easily possible*), and (b) who determines the beginning and end times at work (0 = *usually someone else*; 4 = *only me*). This variable has value 0 if the person does not have a job. A higher value indicates more flexibility.

To measure skills, the respondents were asked to judge themselves and their partner (if any) on a scale from 1 to 10 with respect to their skills in cleaning, cooking, home maintenance, and child care in the written questionnaire. The male partner was asked these questions about home maintenance, and the female partner was asked about cleaning, cooking, and child care. We tried to minimize the risk of social desirability by asking these questions in the written questionnaire instead of the face-to-face interview. The skill levels of the female and male partner were included in the analyses. We tested for nonlinear effects with quadratic terms (only significant quadratic effects reported), because differences in trust problems may be

especially large for couples with relatively low skills. Couples with fairly high skill levels may be just as capable to judge the output as highly skilled couples. In general, people judged their skills highest for child care, with an average of 8.32 for women and 7.94 for men, whereas the skills for home maintenance were lowest for female partners, although still reasonable, with an average of 6.23. Men had the lowest skills for cleaning, with an average of 6.64.

Both the female and male partner were asked about their quality standards during the face-to-face interview. Standards are indicated by the reported minimum acceptable quality levels of cleaning, cooking, and child care, which range from 1 to 10 (1 = *low output standard*; 10 = *task has to be done perfectly*). Quality standards are, not surprisingly, especially high for child care: Parents indicated a minimum level of child care of nearly 8.41 for women and 8.08 for men on a 10-point scale. Unfortunately, similar information was not available for home maintenance. Again, quadratic terms were included if significant.

The household's general level of trust was measured with the following six items from Yamagishi's trust scale (Yamagishi, 1986; Yamagishi & Sato, 1986): (a) In dealing with strangers, it is better to be cautious until evidence has been provided that the stranger is trustworthy, (b) in these competitive times, one has to be careful, or someone will take advantage of you, (c) one should not trust others until one knows them well, (d) most people will tell you a lie if they can benefit by doing so, (e) if someone gives you a compliment, it is because they want something from you, and (f) given the opportunity, people are dishonest. Both partners replied to each of these items on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 to 5 (1 = *strongly agree*; 5 = *strongly disagree*). The items were then added. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$ , indicating the reliability of the scale, was .83 for both female and male partners. A higher value on the scale indicates a higher level of trust. Again, we tested for nonlinear effects with quadratic terms.

We controlled for age of the respondent (continuous variable) and the highest education level in the household (11 categories, varying from 1 = *no preliminary education* to 11 = *PhD, MD*). The net monthly household income (in thousands of euros) and a dummy variable indicating home ownership were also included.

Because three of the dependent variables are dichotomous (whether or not a task is outsourced), logistic regression models were estimated for the outsourcing of home maintenance, domestic help, and child care. Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models were estimated for the number of



times per month that alternatives for cooking were used. As a consequence of the multistage sample, the households in the sample were clustered in 30 organizations. The standard errors in the regression models were modified for clustering of the observations (Rogers, 1993).

## Results

### Summary Statistics

The summary statistics for our dependent variables appear in Table 1. In total, 74% of all households had outsourced maintenance in the preceding year. Of all households in the sample, 39% hired domestic help and 80% of the households with children made use of forms of child care. On average, the households used alternatives for home cooking approximately seven times per month.

### Multivariate Analyses

Table 2 presents the results of the multivariate analyses explaining the use of outsourcing alternatives for cleaning, home maintenance, child care, and cooking. For the dichotomous dependent variables (home maintenance, domestic help, and child care), odds ratios are presented. For the model explaining the number of times per month that alternatives for cooking are used, unstandardized OLS regression coefficients are presented.

### Cleaning

We find little evidence that time availability and demand capability influence the use of cleaning services (Table 2). Double earners are somewhat more likely to outsource housecleaning than single earners, but one-and-a-half earners are not. With respect to women's share in domestic work, we find that more specialized households are less likely to outsource cleaning. The presence of children under the age of 13 does increase the likelihood of outsourcing cleaning.

Couples in which the male partner is able to work from home are significantly more likely to outsource cleaning. This finding is surprising because we mainly expected an effect of working from home by women, because cleaning is traditionally a female task. Women's flexible work schedule increases the likelihood of outsourcing cleaning as expected, but skills do not influence the outsourcing of cleaning. Apparently, skilled people are not

*(text continues on page 21)*

**Table 1**  
**Outsourcing Behavior, Benefits of Outsourcing**  
**Indicators, Trust Problem Indicators, and Control**  
**Variables: Descriptive Statistics (N = 740)**

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range
Outsourcing of cleaning <sup>a</sup>	0.39	0.49	0-1
Outsourcing of home maintenance <sup>a</sup>	0.74	0.44	0-1
Outsourcing of child care <sup>a</sup>	0.80	0.40	0-1
Outsourcing of cooking	6.81	5.80	0-48
Employment status			
Double earner <sup>b</sup>	0.35	0.48	0-1
One-and-a-half earner <sup>c</sup>	0.47	0.50	0-1
Single earner <sup>d</sup>	0.13	0.34	0-1
Share of female partner in household work	62.22	15.29	4.03-100
Number of children under age 13 <sup>e</sup>	0.86	1.00	0-4
Female partner			
Working from home <sup>e</sup>	0.07	0.26	0-1
Flexible work schedule	2.62	1.39	0-4
Cleaning skills	7.76	1.18	1-10
Home maintenance skills	6.23	1.69	1-10
Child care skills	8.32	0.94	1-10
Cooking skills	7.67	1.20	1-10
Cleaning quality standards	7.26	1.14	1-10
Child care quality standards	8.41	0.99	1-10
Cooking quality standards	7.53	1.24	1-10
General level of trust	20.28	3.92	6-30
Male partner			
Working from home <sup>e</sup>	0.11	0.31	0-1
Flexible work schedule	3.01	1.12	0-4
Cleaning skills	6.64	1.63	1-10
Home maintenance skills	7.23	1.60	1-10
Child care skills	7.94	1.16	1-10
Cooking skills	7.04	1.78	1-10
Cleaning quality standards	6.91	1.25	1-10
Child care quality standards	8.08	1.08	1-10
Cooking quality standards	7.41	1.28	1-10
General level of trust	19.26	4.17	7-30
Highest education level	8.54	1.88	2-11
Monthly income (in thousands of euros)	3.02	1.60	1-14.69
Home ownership <sup>f</sup>	0.83	0.38	0-1
Age of respondent	41.50	8.56	23-62

a. Outsourcing of cleaning, home maintenance, child care: 0 = *no outsourcing*; 1 = *outsourcing*.

b. Double earner: 0 = *other earner types*; 1 = *double earner*.

c. One-and-a-half earner: 0 = *other earner types*; 1 = *one-and-a-half earner*.

d. Single earner: 0 = *other earner types*; 1 = *single earner*.

e. Working from home: 0 = (*almost*) *never works from home*; 1 = *occasionally works from home*.

f. Home-ownership: 0 = *no home-owner*; 1 = *home-owner*.

g. *n* = 323.

**Table 2**  
**Summary of Logistic Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting the**  
**Outsourcing of Home Maintenance, Cleaning, Child Care, and Ordinary Least**  
**Squares Regression Model for Variables Predicting the Outsourcing of Cooking,**  
**Controlling for Background Variables and Corrected for Clustering by Organization**

Variable	Cleaning		Home Maintenance		Child Care		Cooking	
	OR	SE (B)	OR	SE (B)	OR	SE (B)	B	SE (B)
Employment status								
Double earner	1.63 <sup>†</sup>	0.54	0.60	0.27	3.07 <sup>†</sup>	2.16	0.35	0.50
One-and-a-half earner	0.99	0.32	1.11	0.33	3.69**	1.94	0.37	0.49
Single earner (ref.)								
Share female partner in household work	0.99 <sup>†</sup>	0.00	0.99**	0.00	1.00	0.00	-0.01 <sup>†</sup>	0.00
Number of children under age 13	1.36***	0.12	0.83 <sup>†</sup>	0.10	3.68***	1.11	-0.51	0.11
Female partner								
Working from home (1 = yes; 0 = no)	1.01	0.25	1.41	0.53	0.39*	0.19	-0.12	0.46
Flexible work schedule	1.13 <sup>†</sup>	0.09	0.95	0.06	1.43**	0.17	0.11	0.12
Skills in household task	1.00	0.08	1.55**	0.27	0.86	0.20	-0.20 <sup>†</sup>	0.12
Skills in household task squared	—	—	0.97*	0.02	—	—	—	—
Quality standards household task	0.99	0.05	—	—	1.02	0.16	-0.41*	0.23
General level of trust	1.06**	0.02	0.98	0.02	2.00**	0.56	-0.04	0.05
General level of trust squared	—	—			0.98**	0.01	—	—
Male partner								
Working from home (1 = yes; 0 = no)	2.51**	0.79	1.47	0.59	0.95	0.44	0.73	0.82
Flexible work schedule	1.07	0.09	1.26*	0.14	1.07	0.20	0.38***	0.11

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

Variable	Cleaning		Home Maintenance		Child Care		Cooking	
	OR	SE (B)	OR	SE (B)	OR	SE (B)	B	SE (B)
Skills in household task	0.94	0.05	0.85**	0.05	1.58*	0.37	-0.08	0.09
Quality standards household task	1.07	0.09	-	-	0.15*	0.16	-0.16	0.18
Quality standards household task squared	-	-	-	-	1.13*	0.08	-	-
General level of trust	0.98	0.02	1.31*	0.18	1.01	0.05	-0.02	0.03
General level of trust squared	-	-	0.99*	0.00	-	-	-	-
Constant	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
$\chi^2$	222.85		361.80		212.50			
df	18		18		20			
R <sup>2</sup>							15%	
N	739		740		323		737	

Note: OR = odds ratio. Controls are highest education level, monthly income (in thousands of euros), home ownership, and age of respondent (omitted from the table). Working from home was coded as 1 for *yes* and 0 for *no*. Satisfaction with parenting role was scored from 1 for *very dissatisfied* to 5 for *very satisfied*.

\* $p < .10$ . \*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

more likely to outsource because they can perform certain tasks themselves at a relatively low price. Another explanation could be that all households can easily judge cleaning, regardless of skills. Quality standards also do not influence the likelihood of outsourcing cleaning. An explanation for this finding could be that poor-quality cleaning does not involve high costs for households, even if they have high standards. In addition, only a relatively small investment has to be made in explaining how they want things done, which can be used throughout the outsourcing relation. Households may have to invest a few hours in the beginning, but this does not outweigh the advantage of having help thereafter. We find the expected effect for the general level of trust: If the female partner is more trusting, couples are more likely to outsource cleaning.

## Home Maintenance

No clear expectation was formulated about the effect of earner type on the outsourcing of home maintenance, because home maintenance is a discretionary task. More specialized households are less likely to outsource home maintenance, and having more children under age 13 decreases outsourcing.

Working from home does not influence the likelihood of outsourcing maintenance. As expected, the job flexibility of the male partner increases the likelihood of outsourcing maintenance. The influence of skills reveals an interesting gender pattern. For men's maintenance skills, higher skills decrease the likelihood of outsourcing—probably because it is more efficient for skilled men to perform chores themselves. For women, the trust argument applies. The higher the skills of the female partner, the more likely the couple will outsource maintenance. The effect declines but remains positive. Whereas skilled men perform maintenance tasks to show their masculinity, skilled women use their skills to hire someone because they are able to judge the quality. As expected, the more strongly men feel that other people cannot be trusted, the less likely they are to outsource home maintenance.

## Child Care

Couples with two working partners are indeed more likely to outsource child care than single-earner couples. With respect to the other indicators of the benefits of outsourcing, it appears that women's share in domestic work has no effect but that the number of children is important.

Working from home by women decreases the likelihood of outsourcing child care. Women working from home use the time they are at home to

take care of the children themselves rather than to monitor the supplier, because direct monitoring would make outsourcing unnecessary. A flexible work schedule of the female partner increases the likelihood of outsourcing, although not for reasons of monitoring. A flexible schedule of the female partner facilitates using outsourcing alternatives for child care, because day care centers often have strict opening hours.

Couples in which men have greater child care skills are more likely to use outsourcing. Similar to our findings for home maintenance, we find the expected effect of skills for other-gender tasks instead of own-gender tasks. The results are similar for quality standards; men's quality standards have the expected negative effect on the outsourcing of child care. The effect declines but remains negative. The general level of trust of the female partner appears to be important for the decision whether to have an outsider taking care of the children, as expected. The effect declines yet stays positive.

## **Cooking**

There are no significant differences in the outsourcing of cooking between different earner types. For cooking, we find the expected negative effect of women's specialization in household tasks. Not surprisingly, the number of children decreases the use of outsourcing alternatives for cooking.

Men with flexible work schedules seem to use their flexibility to purchase outsourcing alternatives for cooking. Greater cooking skills of the female partner, indicating the ability to monitor quality, decrease the outsourcing of cooking. Perhaps experienced cooks are generally not convinced of the good quality of outsourcing alternatives and are more confident about the quality of their own cooking. In addition, cooking skills decrease the relative costs of own cooking and make outsourcing less attractive. Women with high quality standards are less likely to outsource cooking, as expected. The general level of trust does not influence the outsourcing of cooking.

## **Discussion**

Household outsourcing is an important strategy for households to deal with the competing demands from work and home. Previous research mainly studied whether dual-earner couples use outsourcing as a time-saving strategy, with limited support. These studies typically fail to consider how trust problems affect the outsourcing behavior of households. We argue that trust problems matter in outsourcing decisions, because an

outsider, who is generally less concerned with the household's welfare, enters the privacy of the household and takes over tasks of special value. Because gender is a key concept in studies of household labor, we studied how trust influences outsourcing of both female and male tasks from a gender perspective.

Regarding the benefits of outsourcing as a time-saving strategy, our results show some differences between dual and single earners in their outsourcing behavior. Dual earners are more likely to outsource child care and also more likely to outsource cleaning, but we found no differences for cooking. Possibly, larger differences between earner types would have been found if our sample did not overrepresent dual-earner couples. We found that specialization, as indicated by women's share in domestic work, decreases outsourcing to some extent. In these households, there is a fixed division of labor that reduces the need to outsource cleaning, home maintenance, and cooking. The number of children increases the likelihood of outsourcing cleaning and child care yet reduces the outsourcing of home maintenance and cooking.

We found convincing evidence for our hypothesis that the general level of trust increases the likelihood of outsourcing own-gender tasks. The level of general trust of the female partner influences the outsourcing of child care and cleaning, whereas the male partner's trust in others influences the outsourcing of home maintenance. With respect to cooking, general trust is of less relevance. Only if the privacy of the home is involved, actual entry in the home is made, or in the case of valuable tasks does trust become a significant determinant of household decision making. Our findings are similar to results from the experimental study by Yamagishi and associates (1998), which revealed that general trust is an emancipator of people from the confines of safe relationships.

Our results revealed interesting gendered patterns in couples' outsourcing behavior. Because job flexibility facilitates observation of the outsourcing supplier, we expected that more flexibility of partners facilitates outsourcing of own-gender tasks. Indeed, more flexible work schedules of the female partner increase the likelihood of outsourcing cleaning and child care, whereas men's flexible work schedules facilitate the outsourcing of home maintenance. Interestingly, although cleaning and cooking are considered female tasks, couples in which the male partner has a flexible job are more likely to outsource cleaning and cooking. Working from home by men increases the outsourcing of cleaning. Men use this opportunity to outsource and women do not, probably because they feel uncomfortable being at home with someone else doing "their" work (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001), and uncomfortable outsourcing when they have more flexibility to do the work themselves. Men apparently do not experience this uncomfortable feeling.

Interestingly, partners are less likely to outsource own-gender tasks and more likely to outsource other-gender tasks if they are more skilled. Similarly, we found that partners' quality standards influence the outsourcing of other-gender tasks. For home maintenance and cooking, we found evidence for the production cost argument in the explanation of outsourcing own-gender tasks: The costs of own household labor are lower for skilled persons and therefore they are more inclined to take the responsibility for own-gender tasks. For other-gender tasks, the trust argument is confirmed for home maintenance and child care. Greater skills facilitate outsourcing because skills allow people to judge the quality of the outsourcing service, which reduces the trust problem. Even though it would be economically efficient to perform other-gender tasks in terms of production costs, men and women display gender-linked behaviors and choose to outsource tasks instead of performing other-gender tasks if they are skilled in other-gender tasks. Even if they are highly skilled, men avoid performing women's chores whereas women avoid stereotypically male chores and choose to outsource. That gender considerations are more important than arguments of economic efficiency is not a new idea (Brines, 1994). Husbands earning less than their wife are not willing to take on a larger share of domestic work (Brines, 1994). Our study confirms the gendered nature of outsourcing decisions, as already suggested by the different income effects found by Oropesa (1993) and Cohen (1998). Similarly, research by de Ruijter and associates (2005) revealed that men and women respond to different influences in their outsourcing behavior.

Our data have provided the opportunity to test new hypotheses because they contain measures of outsourcing behavior, the division of housework, as well as extensive measures of trust problems. However, dual earners as well as higher educated people are overrepresented in our sample. The limited variation in earner types in our sample may explain why we found limited evidence for the hypotheses concerning the benefits of outsourcing. In addition, we have restricted ourselves to the analysis of couples' outsourcing decisions. Further research is needed to study how trust problems influence the outsourcing behavior of single men and women. Because they do not have a partner of the opposite sex to fall back on for other-gender tasks, the outsourcing demand is especially high for opposite-gender tasks. However, they might be confronted with substantial trust problems in the outsourcing of these tasks, assuming that they are less able to judge the output than for own-gender tasks. Finally, it would be interesting to study how easy and affordable it is to obtain a reliable supplier. For instance, how easy is it to locate high-quality, affordable child care? The lack of availability and affordability will ultimately decide if it is even possible to outsource.



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